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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: PAN-SAHEL INITIATIVE (PSI) PLAN OF ACTION

REF: STATE 156285

11. (S/NF) Embassy strongly believes that inviting Nigeria to participate in the Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI) conference is vital to the success of the PSI. By reason of Nigeria's political and economic importance, size, demographics and the region's porous borders and well-worn overland routes, Nigeria should attend this meeting and should be asked to support the Initiative. Moreover, if Nigeria is not invited, it may view the Initiative as threatening and exclusionary. Some of the other nations might find Nigeria's exclusion odd as well. Out of distrust and misunderstanding, Nigeria could react by undermining the Initiative.

12. (S/NF) As noted, Nigeria has agreements with several of the participants on the same issues. Trans-border movement of criminals has been a problem in Nigeria for many years. Reports that Nigerien mutineers might have fled to Nigeria demonstrate that Nigeria should be included in this effort. Nigeria, Niger and Chad operate a joint task force to combat insurgency and criminality in the Lake Chad Basin.

13. (S/NF) With heightened cognizance of potential terrorist threats, the GON is aware of the dangers of outsiders fomenting unrest in the already volatile Nigerian environment. Within West Africa, Nigeria is clearly the largest, most important player on security issues and, owing to its huge urban centers and diverse populations, perhaps the most susceptible to terrorist infiltration. With Kano and Maiduguri serving as major hubs on principal traditional trans-Saharan trade routes, large transient and foreign-born populations in those and other cities provide ideal places for terrorists to bide their time or go to ground if faced with pressure across the border. Finally, Nigeria has a solid history of backing USG counter-terror efforts. For example, when other countries refused to bite the bullet and interdict Egyptair hijacker Mohammed Ali Rezaq in the early 90s, it was Nigeria that removed him during a Lagos transit enroute to Sudan and turned him over to the FBI.

14. (U) An additional reason to invite Nigeria is its participation in a permanent joint task force (with Niger and Chad) operating against brigands in the Lake Chad area. Involving the GON at the inception prevents the kind of resentment we experienced with the Nigerians on ACRI. The potential pitfall with inviting Nigeria to the conference is that there seems to be no immediate plans to provide any resources to Nigeria. When the Nigerians discover that other countries are receiving assistance they will seek equal treatment and we must be prepared to respond to their likely assistance on requests.

15. (S/NF) In short, without Nigeria a big piece of the PSI equation is missing. While impossible to predict the level of GON engagement over time, Nigeria's past engagement suggests a strong positive role in the months and years ahead. Bringing Nigeria into the planning stages of the PSI would help ensure its tacit, and possibly active, support -- even in the absence of any immediate prospect of USG material support.

16. (C) We believe that key GON officials to invite might include Director of State Security, LTC L.K.K. Are (retired); National Security Adviser LTG Aliyu Mohammed (retired); MFA Under Secretary for Africa Ambassador Femi George; and Defence Minister Danjuma and/or Minister of State for Defence (Army) Lawal Batagarawa.
JETER